

WORLD DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2000: AN OPPORTUNITY AND CHALLENGE FOR NGOS

WDR 1990 was on poverty. It focused on what to do. Its three legs were employment-intensive growth, social services and human resource development, and safety nets. It framed and set the context for much of the anti-poverty agenda and debate at least in the early 1990s.

WDR 2000 will now again be on poverty. Will it, could it, frame the thinking for development and point to an agenda for humankind not just for a few years, but for a whole century?

As a naïve optimist I believe it could. The WDR 2000 team has a long lead time. Reportedly the members are both committed and open-minded in the very best sense. The question is whether they are able and willing to set out to transform development thinking, behaviours and actions.

Much research, many papers, numerous workshops and much debate and discussion will be directed towards WDR 2000. NGOs could have an influence in many ways, but their voices will be only some among many. Some NGOs can enable the poor to express their realities and make their voices heard. Some NGOs can stress the causes of poverty, especially those most likely to be neglected. The imperative is for each actor and each NGO to assess how best to have a good influence. There will be many ways, and many priorities.

For my part, I believe the WDR 2000 team should be encouraged to stand back and start with reflection on “us” as development professionals, our concepts and actions, and those of poor people. This could lead to three fundamentals:

1. **self-critical awareness:** questioning how the concepts and realities of professionals are formed and reproduced, recognising the need for personal and institutional changes, pointing to the ears of powerful as well as the voices of the weak, and learning how better to learn about and put first the realities and priorities of the poor.
2. **wellbeing and deprivation:** making poverty part of a broader concept of deprivation or ill-being, and wealth and income part of a broader concept of wellbeing or quality of life, in order to capture and express better the realities and priorities of those who are deprived.
3. **diversity and dynamism:** recognising the diversity of deprivation, and the imperative of sensitive dynamism to enable those who are worse off in different ways in different contexts to reduce their deprivation and enhance their wellbeing.

These three fundamentals are latent or explicit in the experiences and findings of the World Bank's own Participatory Poverty Assessments. By contributing to PPAs and other sources of insights into the realities of deprivation and wellbeing, NGOs have now

an opportunity to contribute to a radical, practical and immensely exciting rethink of the nature of development.

If WDR 2000 leads and expresses this rethink, it will be a wonderful breakthrough, and will augur well for a better life for many in the ~~second~~ millenium. Some have talked of an Alternative WDR 2000. At least for the next year, the priority for NGOs and others who are like-minded seems to me not an alternative WDR but so to influence the official one that an alternative is unnecessary. For there seems to be a commitment to open-mindedness on the part of the World Bank team.

20 August 1998

Robert Chambers

Chris